8 Responsibilities and Support for Proficiency in the Language Arts

Together, the [school] community *members can help refocus the school or district priorities for reading, writing, listening, and speaking.*

For students to meet grade-level content standards, comprehensive community systems of support should be developed to advocate a sustained focus on the development of language arts skills for every student. A support system for each school will help in the design, implementation, and evaluation of effective language arts instructional plans, classroom teaching strategies, instructional materials, and support systems for students with special needs.

Responsibilities of the School Community

The school community includes parents and families, classroom teachers and specialist teachers, library media teachers, tutors, paraprofessionals, preschool educators, local educational agencies, school administrators, professional developers, and business, civic, and service organizations. Together, the community members can help refocus the school or district priorities for reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

The school community can participate in the development and implementation of a literacy plan for each school by:

- Insisting on a sustained *schoolwide and communitywide discussion* on students' achievement in the language arts
- Establishing *clear and measurable reading improvement goals* (*Example:* "Every student who is reading below grade level will be provided with a systematic intervention program no later than November 1 of each year." Or: "At Maple Street

School the percentage of students reading at or above grade level will increase from 40 percent to 60 percent by June 1.")

- Implementing a *systematic process for the selection of instructional materials* based on comprehensive information, such as reviewing current and confirmed research or data provided by publishers or conducting pilot tests
- Providing an effective program of *professional development* based on current research and the English–language arts content standards for preservice, new, and continuing teachers
- Encouraging *parent involvement* in a variety of ways (e.g., through regular communication between parents and educators, multiple opportunities for volunteering, parent involvement in school decision making, collaboration with community support agencies)
- Ensuring the availability of well-stocked *classroom libraries and a well-equipped and well-stocked library media center* to provide students with access to a variety of high-quality resources for language arts development
- Creating *partnerships* with business, civic, and service organizations and establishing service-learning projects to seek involvement and support for promoting literacy for all students.

Parents and Families

Parents are their children's first teachers. The child's home language and home literacy experiences form the basis of more formal language development in school. The involvement of parents in their children's early years is an important predictor of the children's success in school (McCollum and Russo, 1993; Chavkin, 1993; National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1994) and is more important than economic status in predicting academic learning (Walberg, 1984). The importance of parents' reading to their children is well documented (Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding, 1988), and parents' conversations with children can be a rich source of language development (Hart and Risley, 1995).

In addition to support for early language development at home, parents can provide a stable source of support for their children's schooling. Recent studies indicate that most parents care deeply about their children's education but may not show their concerns in the same way (Valdés, 1996; Gándara, 1995). For example, some parents may show their support by voicing to their children consistent respect for the value of education. Other parents may support completion of homework or volunteer in the classroom. In addition, parents may serve in an advisory capacity on a school-site council or manage activities in the library media center, such as the shelving and checking out of books. Classroom teachers or librarians can promote and expand parent involvement through family literacy events, visits by guest authors, summer reading programs, and book fairs. Regardless of the way in which parents or family members support education, they should always be made to feel welcome and know that their contributions are welcomed and appreciated.

Parents and families should be well informed about the language arts curriculum their children receive and the progress their children are making in learning to read, write, speak, and listen. The school and school district should provide outreach to inform parents and families about the English–language arts content standards, the district's curriculum and assessment programs, and the degree to which students in the school and district are mastering the standards in the language arts. Materials and programs should be organized so that parents and families can receive specific information and support for extending their children's learning at home. Parents and families should be made aware, as appropriate, of resources available to support their own literacy, such as Even Start or adult education. Ultimately, parents and families are the most essential partners in promoting the value of reading and writing and in providing the home support needed for children to master the standards in the language arts.

Classroom Teachers

The impact of an outstanding classroom teacher on a child's life can be dramatic. Good teachers are effective because they work hard at perfecting their teaching ability over a long period of time. Development of their craft comes from years of formal college training, experience in the classroom, periodic professional development, and an undying commitment to learning.

The demands on teachers in California are greater than ever before. More and more teachers are being called on to be reading teachers regardless of whether they have had formal training in teaching students how to read. In standards-based education

teachers will be expected to help their students master areas of the curriculum that were previously attempted only by gifted students. Granted, class size has been reduced in most kindergarten through grade three classrooms in California. But in those classrooms and in classrooms for students in grades four through twelve, the diversity of students' prior experiences provides a challenge as teachers try to adapt instruction to a range of experience and ability.

To help teachers build expertise and find satisfaction in their work, ongoing professional development should target specific knowledge and skills. It should also provide consistent support for improved teaching through coaching, the pairing of teachers with a mentor or buddy, and collegial discussions about the design and implementation of effective language arts programs. Teachers should have a role in designing their own professional development, which should be planned and organized and should lead to long-term goals and be supported over time.

For new teachers the requirements for preparation and the support for their induction into the teaching profession are changing rapidly. For example, to earn a multiple-subjects teaching credential, teacher candidates must now pass the *Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA),* which tests the knowledge, skills, and abilities of new teachers as related to teaching reading. Areas assessed include phonemic awareness; concepts about print; systematic, explicit phonics and other word-identification strategies; spelling instruction; vocabulary development; reading comprehension; student independent reading and its relationship to improved reading performance; relationships between reading, writing, and oral language; diagnosis of reading development; and the structure of the English language. Preservice programs

specifically prepare teacher candidates for *RICA* as a part of their courses in reading instruction.

Specialist Teachers

Even with the most effective literacy instruction in place, some students, for a variety of reasons, struggle with reading or are unable to read at grade level. “Such students will require supplementary services, ideally from a reading specialist who provides individual or small-group intensive instruction that is coordinated with high-quality instruction from the classroom teacher” (National Research Council, 1998).

Reading specialists, resource specialists, and speech and language therapists are key individuals in the provision of supplementary services for students not achieving in reading and language arts as well as in the implementation of the overall language arts program. As knowledgeable and experienced teachers of reading and language, specialists can assume a leadership role in the school by modeling effective instruction, presenting professional development activities, organizing early intervention, assisting with assessment activities, consulting with classroom teachers, and facilitating schoolwide planning and decision making for the language arts. The role of specialists in supporting the work of classroom teachers is especially important as teachers grapple with the implementation of content standards and shifts in instructional materials and practices.

Most importantly, specialists play a key role in intervention by working with teachers to identify students who need assistance, conducting specialized assessments, and providing the extra instruction and support students need to master the language arts standards. Specialists "could specialize in knowledge about the cognitive processes involved in typical acquisition of academic skills, in knowledge about the ways in which children might go awry in acquiring important cognitive and academic skills, and in adapting instruction for children with a variety of cognitive and academic difficulties" (Spear-Swerling and Sternberg, 1998).

Library Media Teachers

The American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (1998) point to the importance of library media teachers as learning resource and technology specialists and instructional partners. When the library media teacher, who knows the learning resources, technologies, skills, and information problem-solving process, acts as a partner with the classroom teacher, who knows the students and the curricular content to be addressed, they expand students' learning opportunities and directly improve achievement (Lance, Rodney, Hamilton-Pennell, 2000; Lance, 2002.). By codesigning and implementing resource-based learning and other cross-disciplinary projects, library media teachers and classroom teachers help students apply language arts skills to genuine information problems.

Particularly at the elementary school level but later too, library media teachers contribute to students' success in literary response and analysis. The library media credential equips library media teachers with extensive background in literacy genres for children and young adults. They know the characteristics of different genres and

authors; can easily connect books similar in setting, character, plot, or theme; and can work with teachers to locate useful examples of literary devices, such as simile, metaphor, and personification. In effectively conveying that aspect of reading comprehension to students, they are essential partners with classroom teachers.

Library media teachers, who are teachers primarily, have an additional credential that extends their expertise into literature, the research process, library management, and information technologies. The dynamic library field is changing with the advent of expanded information access afforded by the digital age. They can contribute to expanding students' literacy, information acquisition, and ability to become independent, self-directed learners. Library media teachers provide motivation to read and guidance in personal reading and reach out to the community and parents to encourage family literacy. They also teach students how to use the online catalog, how to locate information, how to think about what they have found in relation to what they need, and how to communicate what they have learned in print and in multimedia formats (Eisenberg and Berkowitz, 2000).

Tutors

Tutoring is *not* a substitute for teaching. Tutoring methods should complement professional teaching, not supplant it. Pinnel and Fountas (1997) conclude that effective tutoring embodies an organized, well-articulated system that includes strong leadership, quality training, appropriate instructional materials, careful monitoring, alignment with classroom instruction, and communication among classroom teachers, tutors, and parents. Yet it is exactly in those areas that programs are often planned ineffectively or not at all (Topping, 1998).

Among the goals of tutoring and other remedial programs are improved literacy skills (in both reading and writing), reading fluency and comprehension at grade level or above, significant gains in reading achievement, increased motivation, greater self-confidence in reading and writing, and ability to transfer literacy skills to other content areas. Some of the most effective tutoring activities are those that involve modeling and scaffolding and are adaptive to the individual student.

Because of the great number of tutoring approaches (e.g., pullout programs, after-school or before-school coaching classes, peer or cross-age tutoring, paired reading, and summer classes) and the variety of potential providers (e.g., reading specialists, credentialed teachers, trained paraprofessional, college students, trained volunteers, and cross-age peers), setting up a remedial program requires informed choices. Selection of the type of supplementary approach to be used and the type of tutor to be provided should be based primarily on the specific needs of students. For instance, students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities must be supported by specialized professionals adequately trained to work with such students. As stated in *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (National Research Council, 1998), "Although volunteer tutors can provide valuable practice and motivational support for children learning to read, they should not be expected either to provide primary reading instruction or to instruct children with serious reading problems."

According to *Preventing Early School Failure* (1994), the tutoring programs with the best long-term success in effecting and maintaining achievement gains are those that use teachers rather than aides as tutors. Unfortunately, cost often restricts the use of

that approach. Tutoring programs that employ paraprofessionals should be carefully planned and supervised. Available resources are also a factor in the selection of the type of supplementary services used. “However, more is not necessarily better; the cost effectiveness of elaborate training programs requiring many hours [to train tutors] must be considered” (Topping, 1998).

Ideally, success in reading can be enhanced for most students who need intervention through good learning experiences in preschool and kindergarten, a quality reading program in the early grades, brief intervention strategies or programs applied at critical points, and family support. A smaller proportion of students may require more extensive intervention strategies (Slavin, Karweit, and Wasik, 1993).

Paraprofessionals

Opportunities for planning, ongoing communication, and collaboration with teachers are critical for all paraprofessionals, whether associated with the classroom or the library media center, to ensure coordinated, systematic programs for students. Regularly scheduled offerings for staff development specifically tailored to the needs of the paraprofessionals are also important to improving their skills and knowledge.

Research indicates that paraprofessionals can have a positive impact on student success when trained to provide structured one-on-one tutoring (Slavin, Karweit, and Wasik, 1993). A collaborative model featuring open communication between the classroom teacher, the specialist teacher, and the paraprofessional works well in

maximizing the effectiveness of paraprofessionals. Critical to the success of this model is the ongoing training and coaching of the paraprofessional.

Similarly, bilingual paraprofessionals paired with monolingual teachers need time to communicate regularly with the classroom teacher under whose direction they work. The paraprofessionals and the teachers should discuss student needs and progress, alternative strategies, and the use of appropriate materials to help students access fully the core curriculum and acquire English.

Preschool Educators

Preschool educators and day-care providers have a key responsibility and an opportunity to provide literacy experiences that will help children meet or exceed language arts standards in the elementary school. Expectations for language arts learning in the preschool years are presented in *Teaching Reading* (CDE, 1996b). Language development is a fundamental element of success in literacy. Early childhood educators recognize that speaking and listening abilities are critical factors in young children's cognitive and social and emotional development. Young children begin to build a foundation for reading and writing through oral communication with adults and other children about everyday experiences. As young children make connections between spoken and written language, they extend their understanding to include symbolic forms used to capture speech.

Adults can aid language development in children by creating a language-rich environment that includes opportunities for language use and interaction, focused stimulation on particular language features, routines that connect events and language, and social interaction between children (see *Fostering the Development of a First and a Second Language in Early Childhood,* CDE, 1998b). Such behaviors may be

encouraged in the context of children's play, small-group exploration time, or individual (one-on-one) awareness or exploration activities.

The connection between language development and literacy for young children is featured in *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (National Research Council 1998):

> Research with preschoolers has demonstrated that (a) adult-child shared book reading that stimulates verbal interaction can enhance language (especially vocabulary) development and knowledge about concepts of print; and (b) activities that direct young children's attention to the sound structure within spoken words . . . and to the relations between print and speech can facilitate learning to read. These findings are buttressed by others showing that knowledge of word meanings, and understanding that print conveys meaning, phonological awareness, and some understanding of how printed letters code the sounds of language contribute directly to successful reading.

Preschool programs and day-care-home experiences must, therefore, ensure that children have abundant opportunities to listen to stories, converse, play with language through rhymes and literature, talk about a variety of words and their meanings, hear and repeat correct language structures, gain understanding of the rich and varied forms of print, learn letters of the alphabet, and practice reading and writing behaviors. *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (National Research Council 1998) encourages parents and preschool educators to "spend time in one-on-one conversations with young children, read books with them, provide writing materials, support dramatic play that might incorporate literacy activities, demonstrate the uses of literacy, and maintain a joyful, playful atmosphere around literacy activities." Those

learning opportunities are important for all children, especially those limited in their exposure to literacy and vocabulary enrichment experiences before entering school.

For preschool programs to promote effectively children's language and literacy development, preschool educators must participate in ongoing professional development, collaborate with elementary school colleagues, and engage in supportive interactions with families.

Local Educational Agencies

A major premise of local control within the state's educational system centers on the quality of instruction offered to all students. Local educational agencies (LEAs) should establish a special priority for preventing reading difficulties affecting students from families living in poverty, students with disabilities, and English learners—all of whom constitute the fastest-growing segment of America's school population. At the very least LEAs must set high standards for instruction and programs in the language arts. Determining what is of "high" instructional quality should, however, result from research and demonstration and not from a consensus of opinion among content experts, curriculum organizations, or personnel in a state agency or local educational agency.

Local priorities are established within the requirements of state law and regulations by a school district governing board, whose members represent the electorate. A school district's accountability rests, therefore, with the school board and the public. Through policy development an elected school board provides direction for the operation of a school system, including instruction. The school board is responsible for setting policy, and the administration is responsible for recommending policy to the school board and implementing adopted board policy. This process should include a data-based

management system for analyzing, reporting, and representing student performance data as a critical factor in determining a school's success in the language arts.

School Administrators

The school principal must know the essential elements of a research-based language arts program. In addition, he or she must establish a culture within the school in which effective research-based programs are valued and demanded by teachers, parents, administrators, and other stakeholders.

The principals for kindergarten through grade three must establish the language arts, especially beginning reading, as a top priority for the curriculum. For grades four through eight and nine through twelve, the principals must establish the language arts as a priority for all students and implement a specially designed system of instruction (e.g., extended language arts or remedial reading support) for supporting students not proficient in the language arts. Although the school principal is responsible for staff support and resources, the deployment of these resources should be guided by the school's literacy plan and priorities. Such a plan must have as an integral part an accountability system at each grade level. As the school instructional leader, the principal should:

- Understand and provide staff with information about the *English–Language Arts Content Standards* and research-based programs and interventions in the language arts. Provide staff with the time needed to discuss the standards and

current research to establish and promote an understanding of instructional programs demonstrated to improve student achievement.

- Maximize and protect instructional time for the language arts and ensure that adequate personnel and resources are available to support program implementation.
- Provide time for monthly grade-level meetings that focus on assessing student work samples, progress-monitoring data, and articulation of the language arts standards throughout the school.
- Build reflective practice among all faculty by (1) providing guidance and informed feedback on classroom instruction; and (2) facilitating and encouraging structured dialogue among faculty members about results-oriented instruction and strategies to help every student meet grade-level standards.
- Provide leadership in defining and articulating the language arts program. A process should be established for (1) examining results for individual students; and (2) using data to identify program needs and to ensure that all students receive sufficient instruction and support to achieve mastery.
- Provide time for modeling effective instruction, training, and coaching teachers whenever possible. Time should also be provided for teachers to visit other classrooms at the school and at model implementation sites so that successful instruction can be observed.
- Monitor the implementation process and anticipate future opportunities, needs, and problems through frequent classroom visits.
- Establish schoolwide systems to ensure that students with special needs are (1) assessed early to determine need for additional and specialized instruction; (2)

monitored to determine when and if additional support is needed; and (3) included in all state, school district, and schoolwide assessments.

- Establish a schoolwide system to ensure that students who are advanced learners and have exceeded standards are placed at appropriate levels of instruction and are working toward standards they have not yet mastered.
- Align the instructional methods, materials, and schedules across programs and personnel to maximize learning.

Professional Developers, University and College Partners, and Professional Organizations

Teachers well prepared to teach reading and the language arts are vital to the success of language arts instruction. The adoption of content standards and recent changes in assessment and instructional materials require teachers to gain new knowledge and alter classroom practices. Experienced teachers need support in learning and applying new curriculum and instructional strategies, and new teachers and teacher candidates need even greater support in learning to teach reading and the language arts as they acquire the fundamentals of teaching.

Professional developers from school districts, county offices of education, colleges and universities, and professional organizations are key individuals in the support of new and experienced teachers. Their responsibility is to understand content standards, frameworks, and assessment in California and to teach new and continuing teachers about the key features of the educational landscape in the state. Professional organizations support teachers with publications that support current and confirmed research in language arts instruction and opportunities for networking and training. Funding for professional development and the support of new teachers has increased

dramatically in recent years, providing schools and school districts with important opportunities to increase teacher knowledge and effectiveness in language arts instruction. Knowledgeable and collaborative leadership within schools, school districts, counties, and regions is necessary to marshal the resources necessary to train, support, and coach California's professional teaching staff adequately.

Business, Civic, and Service Organizations

Schools may create partnerships with a variety of public and private organizations and agencies to seek support and participation in the education of California's children. Many private companies and organizations have education departments that seek opportunities to work with youngsters. Schools are encouraged to (1) use those kinds of community resources to provide the additional adult support that students need to meet their literacy requirements; and (2) start to develop ideas about the workforce, careers, and students' relationships to their communities. Service-learning projects benefiting both partners can be established between schools and community organizations. When students work alongside others from their own communities to identify and solve local problems, they build civic responsibility and practice literacy skills. Literacy is improved when the students apply their language arts skills in their service-learning activities and perform research, read, write, and speak about their service projects and experiences. Through service-learning projects involving tutoring and mentoring, older students also support the literacy of younger students.

Partnerships with business, civic, and professional organizations can also serve to keep schools focused on their mission—learning and reaching the goals of the literacy improvement plan. As schools accomplish their literacy goals, they gain greater credibility and support in the community. In the face of increased social, technological, and cultural changes, a whole community can help educate a child or at least help ensure that every child will reach proficiency in the language arts standards.

Instructional Materials

Balanced, comprehensive language arts programs are based on high-quality learning materials—from basal series and literature to factual expository works in books and in other formats. A powerful language arts curriculum should engage students with literature written in English or translated from other languages. The high-quality materials should reflect the faces and resonate with the voices of learners in California, representing their diverse linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds. Access to materials in the students' home languages promotes growth in concept development and academic language as the students acquire English as their second language.

Schools foster literacy when they ensure that students have access to extensive collections of high-quality, high-interest reading materials in the classroom, in the school library media center, in community libraries, and in the home to allow for daily teacher-directed and voluntary reading. Schools also enhance literacy when they provide students with access to other learning resources and technologies.

Classroom Resources

Children benefit from having age-appropriate and skill-reinforcing magazines, journals, and books in the classroom. At every grade level classroom collections should reflect a wide variety of reading interests, favorite authors, and topics related to the instructional program. In the primary grades classroom resources must include large numbers of highly readable books and other items that allow students to practice and reinforce their growing literacy. Classroom libraries are enhanced when students and teachers acquire outstanding, high-interest books by notable authors and illustrators for young people. The books may be borrowed from the school library media center or the public library. Frequent access to extensive school library collections is an effective way to maintain fresh classroom collections, allow students to select books of personal interest, and keep reading motivation high.

Classrooms are enhanced when supplied with adequate hardware, software, and Internet-based resources for students to use in language arts instruction. *Connect, Compute, and Compete* (CDE, 1996c) recommends a student-to-computer ratio of four to one and telecommunications access for students in every classroom and library. The recommendations are consistent with the federal technology goals: (1) modern computers and learning devices will be accessible to every student; (2) classrooms will be connected to one another and to the outside world; (3) educational software will be an integral part of the curriculum; and (4) teachers will be ready to use and teach with technology.

Collections in the Library Media Center

In addition to the classroom library, the school's library media center is a focal point of reading. The center's collection consists of learning resources and technologies

carefully selected to meet the teaching and learning needs of teachers and their students and supports curriculum and instruction at the point of need. The collection should contain at least 20 books per student professionally selected in accordance with a district selection policy (American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998). The books should be classified and labeled and should be accessible, preferably on computer via an automated catalog. The collection should be up-to-date and contain a wide variety of high-quality expository works as well as a full range of narrative genres, from picture books to contemporary fiction. Also to be included are fantasy, historical fiction, science fiction, folklore, poetry, biography, career-related books and materials, and books representing many voices and diverse points of view.

Access to a well-developed book collection and electronic resources, selected with the guidance of a credentialed school library media teacher and housed in the school library media center, (1) allows teachers to help students broaden and extend their study of core works; and (2) allows students to benefit from a broad spectrum of reading choices to meet their learning needs. Students should be given access to outstanding examples of multicultural literature across genres to extend literary response and analysis. The center should also provide the learning resources and technologies students need to pursue problem solving, thereby applying and deepening essential reading-comprehension skills. And the center should allow students to begin to develop the skills that will allow them to become independent, self-directed learners for the rest of their lives. Library media teachers, in collaboration with classroom teachers, teach the skills and strategies that allow students intellectual access to the resources.

Physical access to the collections in the library media center depends on:

- Having a sufficient number of qualified staff to keep the library open
- Having sufficient shelving space for the recommended number of books per student (20)
- Having the technology resources that allow for expanded access to information, including adequate hardware, software, and Internet access
- Developing flexibility in the schedule so that students can come to the library every day if they need to do so
- Developing policies that allow that books be taken home and multiple titles to be borrowed and that make the library a lively, welcoming center for the school as a reading community

The schedule should allow for whole-group visits, small-group work, and times for individual browsing, exploring, and voluntary, self-selected reading.